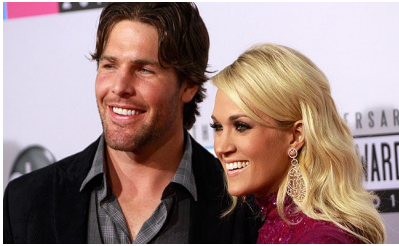


Rocky Faith: A New Beginning

John 1:40-43

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So, February 27 Carrie Underwood & Mike Fisher had a baby – little Isaiah Michael Fisher.

Gotta wonder how life is going to be for that superstar family: country singer mom, NHL hockey player dad.

Like – will that kid toss chunks onto one of mommy's expensive on-stage gowns, just before a performance? Will Isaiah keep daddy awake the night before the big game so that he stumbles into the arena with bags under his eyes and brain in a sleep-deprived fog?

How does that all work in the world of the super rich & famous?
Will that baby even poop? And if so, will it stink?

Happy for this sister and brother in Christ – beautiful believers in Jesus, both of them.
(*in case you didn't know that.*)
It's just - I so totally can NOT relate to their life in any way.
You?

Seems like they have every advantage possible going their way.
Maybe money can't buy happiness – but it'll get a LOT of fancy kid toys & gadgets, and pay for a babysitter... the best possible.

I can so NOT relate!

Or take Oprah – all this advice and stuff she dispenses:

Does she ever need ANY help with her life?

Ever get frustrated?

Ever just stand there, throw up her hands in frustration and say, "*I don't know what to DO?*"

I can so NOT relate!

But once in a while you get a chance to see that superstars are human, too.

Last December NBA star John Wall was interviewed after a 6-year-old friend of his died of lymphoma. The night she died his team played. Wall got 26 points and 17 assists in a dramatic 133-132 double-overtime win. Then came the post-game interview.....

ROLL THE VIDEO

Even superstars grieve – deeply. Also on game night.
And moments like that help us all connect a bit with the common pieces of just being human.

We've got our superstars in the world of faith, too.
Like the 12 apostles.

Best friends of Jesus.

Right there when all the big, very real stuff went down in history.

They walk on water. They do miracles. They convert thousands. They write parts of what will become the bible. They hang out with Jesus for **three years**.

Spiritual superstars if there ever were any.

No **wonder** they believe.

How could you not?

Ach – I could never be like them, or do their kind of spiritual work.

But then when you start to dig, stuff begins to surface which shows that they, too, have very human sides. And those moments help us connect with some of the very common pieces of being a very flawed, limited human friend of Jesus.

I don't know about you, but I'll never be able to claim to be a spiritual superstar.

No faith hat-tricks or spiritual game changers in my life.

Just an ordinary grunt trying to stay connected to God through Jesus, trying to figure out how that works on a day-by-day basis.

So, one day I picked up Michael Card's book, *The Fragile Stone*. It's a wonderful reflection on the life of one of those 12 spiritual-rock-star-disciples, Simon Peter – one of the very best friends that Jesus ever had.

And it helped me to see in fresh ways just how incredibly human Simon really was.

And YET – in spite of being terribly human – just how much wonderful good God was able to work in and through him.

Which gives me hope for my faith and my life..... that maybe there is still some good, maybe even wonderful good, that the Lord can work in me.... and potentially even through me.

And maybe there's still some good, maybe even wonderful good, that the Lord can work in you.... and potentially even through you.

I hope you'll be able to track along with us over the next few weeks as we work our way through a new series here at KCRC, growing out of Card's book, called *Rocky Faith*.

Rocky as in "*Rock sure*"?

Or rocky as in, "*wobbly and not very stable*"?

Which is it?

.....yes....

We begin in John's account of Jesus' life, first chapter. John the Baptist sees Jesus walk by and exclaims "Look! There is the Lamb of God!" And two of John's disciples follow Jesus and end up hanging out for the afternoon with him. Andrew, one of the two, then tracks down his brother Simon. Read with me what follows:

In v.42 the bibles we have here at KCRC say “*Jesus looked at him...*”

Actually in Greek the word (*emblepo*) means “*an intense gaze, a penetrating stare, a piercing glance.*”

One of those when you get the feeling that a person is looking right inside your soul. That's how Jesus looked at Simon.

In chapter two John tells us that Jesus could see right into a person's heart and mind. So.... what did he see in Simon?

Probably someone of a similar age – 30ish.

Probably smelled like fish, that's what he caught for a living.

Never described physically anywhere in the Bible – so probably a pretty ordinary sort of guy.

“You **ARE** Simon.....

You **WILL BE** called Cephas – Peter.”

Simon was the most common name in that day.

Cephas was NEVER known as a name.

The Greek derivative, Peter, didn't become a name till 200 hundred years later.

Both of those translate into the English, “*Rock*” or “*Rocky*”

Cephas / Peter / Rocky – it's not a name.

It's a title.

It represents what this very average fisherman, son of a fisherman, was to become.

A rock for Jesus.

Someone solid, on whom a movement can be built.

Rocky! Rock star Simon.

And in time, so it is.

In every list of disciples, Simon always comes first. (eg Mark 3:16)

The disciples are often called “*Peter and those with him*” (Mark 1:36; Lk 8:45, 9:32)

He's the one who speaks at the transfiguration. (Mark 9:5)

He's the one who walks on water. (Matthew 14:28-31)

When the authorities come with questions, they approach Simon. (Matthew 17:24)

Later Simon proposes the replacement for the traitor Judas. (Acts 1:15-26)

He preaches the first sermon. (Acts 2:14-36)

He performs the first healing. (Acts 3:6)

He's the first to defend the message of Jesus in court. (Acts 4:8-12)

He decides the case of Ananias & Saphira. (Acts 5:1-11)

He mediates between James & Paul (Acts 15:5-11)

He really DOES become a huge star of faith.

But what about right now? Right here?

Who is this guy that Jesus stares into in John 1?

Just an ordinary guy.

You **ARE** Simon.

You **will be** Peter..... yes, when the Lord is done with you, that's what you'll be. Someone noteworthy through whom God will do significant things.

Not the first time this happens in Scripture, either, you know.

Way back in the first book of the bible, out of the mist of history we meet a nomad named Abram. God fingers him, changes his name to Abraham, and says, "*I am going to build an entire nation out of you.*" (Genesis 12:2)

Not because he's particularly great or reliable or strong. In fact, subsequent chapters of Genesis show that the truth is exactly the opposite. He lies. He cheats. He wimps out. Trades his wife away in a moment of fear.

Yet Isaiah 51:1-2 says:

*"Consider the rock from which you were cut
the quarry from which you were mined.
Yes, think about Abraham, your ancestor....
....when I blessed him, he became a great nation."*

What was significant about Abram was what God did with him.

It is that God called him.

It is that God decides to use very ordinary people to accomplish way-more-than-ordinary things.... wobbly, rocky people to built a rock-solid Salvation project here on earth.

Which is what Luke 5:1-11 displays for us, too.

Please read it with me.....

LUKE 5:1-11, p.997

You'll note that in this passage Luke isn't the least bit interested in what Jesus had to say to the crowds. Surely, it must have been amazing! It must have contained deep, eternal truths.

But, no, this is not the message that the Holy Spirit wanted Luke to focus on.

Instead, the focus is on the exchange between Jesus and Simon. On what Jesus pours into Simon's life.

Jesus catches these professional fishermen after one of those frustrating nights where they've been skunked. Empty nets.

He orders them into deeper water and Simon, the only one of the disciples who ever says "No" to Jesus, comes very close to saying it here.

"...because you say so, I will let down the nets...."

Like a kid stomping off to do his chores and yelling back to his parent, "*But I'm not happy about it and I'll probably fail anyway!*"

And the net-ripping, boat-overloading catch results.

Leaving Simon on the ground, shaking, afraid.

Jesus responds, "*Don't be afraid.*"

What's the big deal?

What shakes Simon so badly?

The very clear awareness that his account of life was empty, like the net.

In spite of Jesus having earlier said, “*One day you'll be a rock*”, Simon is aware that he has nothing significant to bring to the table.

Nothing that could allow him to say, “*Here, Jesus, you're lucky I'm here because I can... <whatever> ...and without this your project is a bust.*”

Simon is aware that he,

this totally ordinary guy,

is in the presence of someone who is anything **BUT** ordinary.

Beyond that, he doesn't understand it all yet.

But he knows that his nets were empty.

He's the one who makes a mess of his life quite regularly.

He is well aware that he is, as Michael Card puts it, a “*veteran sinner, in the presence of undiminished Deity.*”

And it undoes him.

As it should.

You ever been in that space where you've come so close to the power and glory of Jesus that it broke you down, dropped you to your knees, left you feeling very small?

That's Simon right now.

And Jesus takes his smelly hand, coated with fish slime, and gently lifts him to his feet.

“*Don't be afraid.*”

The generosity of Jesus towards Simon is totally overwhelming.

So overwhelming that it is frightening.

That's called **GRACE**.

The completely undeserved, beyond-belief generous goodness that Jesus pours into the lives of people like Simon and Abram.

Deserving?

Na! Neither of them.

What they deserve is to be crushed by this one who can snap his fingers and fill both boats to the point of sinking.

GRACE – that the Divine Son of God chooses to work his world-changing, eternal-life-bringing project here on earth through very fallible, limited, pockets-empty people like Simon.

And Simon?

Where he thought that the sea in front of him was empty – Jesus shows that it was, in fact, full of fish.....

Full of potential, when you follow Jesus' directions for letting down the nets.

When you go where Jesus calls you.
When you do as Jesus instructs.
Even if that means leaving the nets behind, and doing something completely new
that you haven't a clue about.

And -
is that only true for Simon and Abram?
Grace only for them?

You could sit here this morning and make a case for that.
Except....

.....well.....

spoiler alert!!

Later this summer we're going to read a letter that Simon Peter wrote, guided by the inspiration of God. It's right near the end of the Bible – 1 Peter. And in chapter 2 this spiritual rockstar writes, *"And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple...."*

Whose that to?

People like you and me.

Common, not-too-brilliant, average looking, callouses-on-the-hands people like you and me.
God's building something beautiful with your lives.

YES – there's generous grace for us, too!!

Can you believe that might be possible?
That maybe he'll call you to something new?
Maybe call us to something new as a congregation?

And we'll sigh and get a scowl on our face like the kid stomping off to reluctantly do his homework, or the tired disciple who DOESN'T want to let down his nets because *any idiot* knows that you don't catch fish in daytime, least of all in the daytime after a night when you got skunked in the same place.

And Jesus says, *"Don't be afraid. After all, it's me. I'm here. Just follow my lead."*
Could it be?